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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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26 April 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: David B. Low
National Intelligence Officer at Large

SUBJECT: Current Status of the Iranian Nuclear Program

1. The 25 April UPI report greatly overestimates Iranian capability to develop nuclear weapons in the near term. The report was probably inspired by recent Iranian interest in resuming work on a nuclear power reactor and a nuclear research center in Teheran that were neglected after the Shah's overthrow.

2. Iran lacks the trained work force and facilities to produce nuclear weapons and will need at least a decade to develop them.

3. Attached is a summary of the current status of the nuclear program drafted by ONESA and OSWR.

4. A similar assessment is being made available to Vice President Bush through the PDB Staff in reponse to a request from his office.



David B. Low

Attachment:
As Stated



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CURRENT STATUS OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Iran lacks the trained scientific workforce and facilities to produce nuclear weapons, and will need at least a decade to develop them. Few of the Islamic loyalists staffing the Nuclear Research Center in Teheran have scientific training. The small, US-supplied reactor at the Center could not produce enough plutonium for a nuclear weapon, even if facilities for extracting the plutonium from spent nuclear fuel were available.

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Although the Bushehr reactors are not optimal for producing weapons-grade plutonium, material for bombs could be produced if one of the reactors can be completed and operated. Additional facilities would be necessary to separate the plutonium from the reactor spent fuel, and diversion of plutonium in this way would be a violation of international safeguards that apply to the reactor. The Iranians would also have to develop the high explosive and other non-nuclear components of a nuclear weapon.

Currently, Iran has little or no indigenous capability either to complete the Bushehr reactors on her own or to reprocess spent fuel. Iran has expressed interest in acquiring hot cells that could be useful for research in areas related to reprocessing. Iran also has no indigenous capability for enriching or processing uranium for use as nuclear reactor fuel.

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